

XVII.—*On some of the Birds of Prey of Central Bulgaria.*

By C. FARMAN, C.E.

[Continued from 'The Ibis' for 1868, p. 414.]

AQUILA CHRYSÆTUS (Linn.). Golden Eagle.

IN comparison with some of the Eagles, this monarch of the airy realms is a scarce bird; I have observed some few individuals in various parts—one near the head of the lower Devna lake, one in the Pravidy valley, and several others in the hill-country to the westward and northward of Shumla.

AQUILA HELIACA (Sav.). Imperial Eagle.

Of all the Eagles to be met with in this country, this is by far the most common, and it breeds in great numbers in all parts of Central Bulgaria.

Nidification commences at the end of March or beginning of April, the 8th of April being the earliest date at which I have found the eggs (some thirty of which I have taken). I have, however, taken fresh eggs of this bird as late as the first week in May. Its favourite place for building its eyry is on an isolated tree, or where the trees are scattered about at some distance from one another, or a clump of two or three, at the most, standing alone in the open country, but where there is little or no cultivation.

The nest is little more than a large flat platform of coarse sticks, about 3 feet 6 inches in diameter, and piled up to the height of 18 inches or 2 feet, but in some old nests much higher. The interior is slightly concave, and lined with a few smaller twigs and a little dry grass, wool, pieces of old rag, or any other small rubbish that comes within their ken; in most instances, however, the lining is very scanty.

The number of eggs in a nest is generally two, sometimes three, never more, and not unfrequently only one.

The Imperial Eagle, always a shy bird and difficult to approach, is even more so during the breeding-season; the male bird is always on the watch, either flying in graceful circles at some height above and about the nest, or seated on some neighbouring tree, whence, on the slightest appearance of danger, he comes swooping down towards his eyry, uttering a hoarse croak-

ing noise, as a warning to the female, who instantly leaves the nest and joins her partner in his circling evolutions high up above their eyry.

Owing to their great sagacity, I found it extremely difficult to approach within shot of them ; the way in which I ultimately succeeded was by riding up to them on horseback. When I discovered a nest I rode straight up to it at full gallop, and as the bird left its nest I pulled up short and shot it ; in this way I succeeded in securing many good specimens, and in one instance I was fortunate enough to secure both birds and their nest of two eggs.

During the breeding-season, if at no other time, the male birds are extremely pugnacious ; and many a desperate encounter between them have I witnessed. On one occasion, when riding home to Shitangick from the works, my attention was drawn to a pair of these Eagles by their loud croaking and hoarse shrieks, which they were both uttering with as much force as their lungs would permit ; and I then witnessed one of the most exciting and desperate duels that ever took place between two birds. The encounter took place at from two to three hundred feet above the ground, and lasted a good twenty minutes. They began the engagement by flying round each other at some little distance, and every now and then one of them would make a dash in at the other, which avoided it in the most dexterous manner, and in his turn became the aggressor ; this, however, only appeared to be their method of "squaring-up" to each other ; for they now went at it in good earnest. After separating from each other for some distance, one of them suddenly turned, and with full force dashed in at his opponent, who also turned to receive the attack, and uttering a hoarse croak they closed with each other. The *mêlée* which now ensued, in which, beak, claws, and wings were equally active, and of which little could be distinguished but a mass of perturbed feathers rolling in the air, is far beyond my powers of description. At last they clutched each other with such a firm grasp that, neither having its wings at liberty, they both came tumbling down in each other's embrace for a distance of a hundred feet or more, when they released their hold and separated for a while ; and thus ended the

first round. The second round began in a similar manner to the first; every now and then one of the birds would make a feint at the other; they now changed their tactics, and by sailing in short spirals each endeavoured to get above his adversary: in this way they rose to a considerable height, till at last one bird having got well above the other, came down upon him with a terrific swoop; the lower bird, nothing daunted, instantly turned right on its back and in a most dexterous manner received his enemy on his outstretched talons; another *mêlée* then ensued similar to the first, ending in the same way by their tumbling down a couple of hundred feet or so in each other's embrace and separating as before. Thus the battle raged for nearly half an hour, when one of the birds having got far up above the other, made a fell swoop down upon his gallant enemy, striking him with great force at a height of about three hundred feet from the ground. The lower bird received him manfully, and fixing his talons well into him, they both came down to the ground with a heavy thud not ten yards from me. I jumped from my horse with the intention of securing these noble gladiators; but when almost within my grasp, they released their hold and made off in different directions. That their fight had been a desperate one, the blood on the spot where they fell bore ample testimony.

AQUILA NÆVIA (Gmel.). Spotted Eagle.

Not uncommon in any part of the country, but most numerous in the neighbourhood of the Devna lakes and in the Pravidy valley. In its habits it strongly resembles the Buzzards, generally flying low in pursuit of its prey, which, if belonging to the feathered tribes, it strikes in the air. It seldom soars to any great height, although on rare occasions I have seen it rise to a height from which it was hardly distinguishable. They generally rest on trees, preferring a dead or sear bough, whence they watch their prey, and, when the opportune moment arrives, dash off in pursuit, again returning to the same resting-place if unsuccessful. When thus engaged they will permit a very near approach; and thus they are very easily shot.

In the spring of 1865 I observed a nest of this bird placed on an ash-tree overhanging the stream at the southern entrance

of the Pravidy valley : it was more neatly put together than most of the Eagles' nests, and was warmly and softly lined with the blossoms of the ash-tree ; it contained one young bird just hatched, and two eggs already cracked by the young birds within. On the edge of the nest were the two fore legs of a leveret. Directly I descended from the tree, one of the parent birds returned to the nest, and I observed her mate sitting on an old dead tree a couple of hundred yards off ; this bird was intently watching a flock of some twenty or thirty Magpies which were busily engaged picking the bones of an old carcass that the Vultures had demolished. As I rode past, the Magpies took to flight, and the Eagle, leaving his resting-place, instantly started off in pursuit of them ; on coming up to them he singled one out, and, after following it through a few intricate but futile attempts to escape, rose slightly above his prey and with one stroke felled it to the ground, and, following it as it fell, reached the ground almost at the same moment.

HALIAETUS ALBICILLA (Linn.). White-tailed Eagle.

Common on the coast of the Black Sea, as also on the shores of the Devna lakes, but most numerous during the early spring.

HALIAETUS LEUCORYPHA? (Pallas). Pallas's Sea-Eagle.

At various times during my two years' residence in this country I have noticed an Eagle that I take to be the above-named ; but, unfortunately, I was never able to preserve a specimen by which to identify it clearly ; nevertheless I had several opportunities of scrutinizing it pretty closely. It differed altogether from any other Eagle that frequents this country, the most obvious distinction being a white head and neck, and a white tail with a dark edging. In the spring of 1865 a pair of these birds built their nests on a gigantic elm-tree growing on the banks of a stream near Uvola, about thirty miles from the sea-coast, where the Pravidy valley opens out into a broad plain, which at this time of the year (April) is covered with water and presents the appearance of a small lake. For two successive days I lay in wait for these birds, and tried in every conceivable way to get within shot of them, but without success ; so ultimately,

not being able to remain longer in that part of the country, I had to content myself with robbing the nest of the young bird it contained, and leaving the parents at large. In the nest, besides the young bird, I found a dainty dish in the shape of the two fore legs of a lamb.

PANDION HALIAETUS (Linn.). Osprey.

The Osprey is here much scarcer than I had expected to find it; indeed it is very rarely to be met with, but occasionally it may be seen on the coast and on the banks of the Devna lakes.

In May, 1865, I observed an Osprey fishing on the stream that connects the two lakes just mentioned, near Geberjeng. It was flying at a height of about a hundred feet, and every now and then it hovered in the air somewhat after the manner of the Kestrels; suddenly down it came, with a whizzing noise, like a thunderbolt, splash into the stream, making a perfect cloud of spray, which for the moment completely hid it from my view; it rose almost immediately with a large fish in its talons, and away it went to the neighbouring rocks, there to enjoy its prey in undisturbed solitude.

BUTEO VULGARIS, Bechst. Common Buzzard.

Not uncommon anywhere between Varna and Rustchuk. In May 1865 my friend Mr. McVean shot a fine male specimen near Karaharge; and other specimens were shot by various other gentlemen then engaged in constructing the Varna Railway.

ARCHIBUTEO LAGOPUS (Linn.). Rough-legged Buzzard*.

Equally common with the preceding species, but most plentiful in the forest-country about Ishicklar, and in the woodlands lying on the right bank of the upper Devna lake.

PERNIS APIVORUS (Linn.). Honey-Buzzard.

I was so unfortunate as never to see a single specimen of this species in its wild state; but that it is a habitant of this country is clearly proved by Mr. McVean having taken a nest of three young birds near Kialdery, at the same time shooting the old male, which he preserved and I afterwards examined.

* [Is not this more likely to have been *Aquila pennata*?—Ed.]

MILVUS ICTINUS (Savign.). Kite.

A common bird all over the country, apparently more numerous during the breeding-season; I shot several at various times.

MILVUS MIGRANS (Bodd.). Black Kite.

Not uncommon about the Devna lakes and in the Pravidy valley; but I seldom observed it much higher up the country. One specimen, a fine male, I shot as high up as Kialdery; but it is rarely that they are seen north of the Pravidy valley.

ATHENE NOCTUA (Retz.). Little Owl.

Common throughout Central Bulgaria; it breeds in the ravines between Kushetchen and Kialdery, and doubtless in many other similar situations.

BUBO MAXIMUS, Fleming. Eagle-Owl.

More or less plentiful throughout the country, but particularly so in the Pravidy valley. Nidification begins somewhat early, namely, about the middle of March. On the 12th of April, 1866, I took a nest containing two eggs and one young bird; I had previously shot the female, and shortly afterwards procured the male also; one of these eggs was so far incubated that I could distinctly hear the young bird chirping within its shelly prison; I placed this egg under a sitting Goose, and in three days it was duly hatched; I then carefully attended to the young bird, and fed it on raw meat chopped very fine. It went on well for about a week, when I was called away on business for a day or two, and had to leave it in charge of one of my servants. I gave him strict injunctions as to its treatment; but on my return I found my young Owl dead, my orders having been neglected.

XVIII.—*Notes on some new South-African Sylviidæ.*

By H. B. TRISTRAM, M.A., F.R.S., &c.

(Plate VI.)

HAVING had several small parcels of South-African specimens of this very interesting family lately intrusted to me for discri-